Historical Society of Palm Desert

P.O. Box 77
Palm Desert, CA 92261
(760) 346-6588

The Hourglass

Community
Service
Collections
Archives

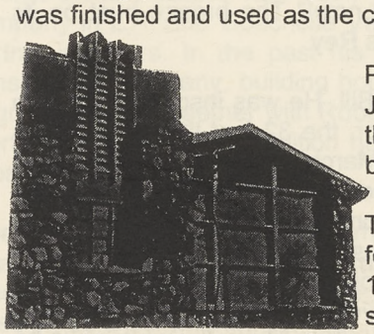
FALL 2006 VOL. 13, NO. 3

LOCAL LANDMARKS & MONUMENTS

by Ginny Folkers from Society Archives

The first substantial commercial structure in Palm Desert was built in 1947 by Randall Henderson to house his Desert Magazine publishing business. Though new development has crowded in on it during the past few years, the adobe-style building still stands proud on Highway 111 just beyond the east end of El Paseo. For years desert artists displayed their works in the main foyer, and it was a popular meeting place for early residents and visitors alike.

Also in the late 1940s Cliff Henderson's vision of a family club was starting to take form. The figure-eight swimming pool which is part of the Shadow Mountain Club has remained a landmark all through the years. It was finished and used as the center for parties and aquatic shows even before there was a clubhouse.



Palm Desert Community Church on Portola Avenue was almost completed by January 1952. The first service was held on Thanksgiving 1948 out-of-doors, later they even used the Shadow Mountain Stables. The property has changed hands, but the building still stands.

Through the 1950's and 60's the Shadow Mountain & Sun Line Railway was to be found on the Shadow Mountain Club grounds; eventually, it was housed in a 12 x 13 foot building. The miniature train attraction was a $3,000 project with rolling stock, trestles, tracks, and elaborate landscaping. Dudley Steele, owner of the model layout, became a fixture in those early years at the Club. He encouraged boys in their young teens to join him in the railroad's operation. Sadly, this is one landmark that no longer exists.

In March of 1954 members of a county-wide committee met at The Desert Inn. They planned to erect a memorial to General George Patton and the soldiers who trained under his command. Palm Desert was chosen because it was the location of a Vehicle Maintenance Pool during 1942 and 1943; that's when Palm Village was the center of town. The actual memorial was a huge rock that was placed at the post office prior to 1960. Then it was mysteriously moved one night to the Shadow Mountain Club by unknown persons. Palm Desert Library became its permanent home in 1961, and a plaque was affixed to it in April of 1962. Today, you will find it at the corner of Portola Avenue and Shadow Mt. Drive at the Portola Community Center.

Did you know that the tallest palm in the Coachella Valley is located in Palm Desert? At least it was the tallest back in the early 1960s; we aren't sure if there are any others that have caught up with it. Cliff Henderson arranged to have it transplanted at the northwest corner of the intersection of Highway 111 and Portola Avenue. That is where you will see it today -- at the Arco gas station and mini-mart. It is a Mexican fan palm.

Palm Desert's first billboard was a "WELCOME" sign located on the corner of El Paseo and Highway 111. That served as effective advertising until the western approach to Palm Desert was changed by the realignment of Highway 111 in the early 1960's. The Merchants' Division of the Chamber of Commerce initiated the idea of putting a sign at both the east and west entrances of Palm Desert and at Highway 74 along Highway 111. They launched a 5-week, nation-wide contest to design the signs. An informal dedication was held on May 18, 1968 for a rock wall topped with a Palm Desert framed sign and flag pole complex. It was designed by architect William Cody, who also donated the land on which it was constructed. Located at Painter's Path and Highway 111, it was financed to the tune of $5,000 by many businesses and individuals residing in Palm Desert under the leadership of Marian Henderson and her Desert Beautiful organization. This project was removed and replaced in 1980 by developers of the Los Sombres Village restaurant park in the same block. The new sign did not receive a favorable welcome. It consisted of a row of concrete pillars with "Palm Desert" lettering, along with a row of signs identifying civic organizations in the city.

On March 2, 1969 the Vietnam War Memorial, a bronze-plaqued obelisk of blue marble, was dedicated at the Painter's Path at Highway 111 location. In early 1980 the contractor who was building the restaurant complex removed it, along with the west entrance sign, until construction was finished. It was relocated to the front yard of this Society's historic fire house on El Paseo and rededicated on Veteran's Day, November 11, 2005

Just after Palm Desert's incorporation in November 1973, a small Sandpiper sales office on the corner to El Paseo and Highway 74 became the first city hall. By June of 1974 city hall had moved to a new facility in Prickly Pear Square on El Paseo. This location was used until the present city hall complex was dedicated on 12-3-83.

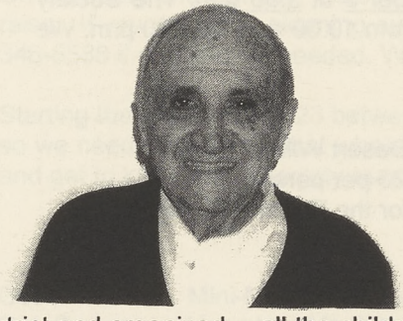
A letter dated 3-16-78 went out to the citizens of Palm Desert regarding a bronze statue of C. W. Henderson. It was sent by a personal friend of Cliff's, Don Kennedy, and it was enthusiastically endorsed by Mayor Ed Mullins. Donations could be sent in care of Desert Beautiful by all who wanted Clifford W. Henderson recognized as Founder of the City of Palm Desert; $3,300 was still needed to make a total of $7,500. The presentation to Cliff was scheduled for April 14, 1978 .... 'It was a secret, so please don't let Cliff find out about it.' Two days later ..... another letter was mailed: Palm Desert artist, Henry McCann, has finished the clay form and it is ready for the bronze foundry, someone donated a pedestal, and a prominent location on El Paseo was tentatively approved. A gala ceremony accompanied the unveiling, along with a dinner at Shadow Mountain Club attended by many citizens and prominent personalities. One of Cliff's comments at the presentation: "That big nose is going to stay there for a long time. But I lived with it for 83 years, so I guess I won't blow it now!" The bronze bust on its pedestal can be seen on the El Paseo median between Prickly Pear and San Luis Rey.

In the early 80s Mark Stembler was an art student attending C.O.D. on the G.I. Bill. He was inspired to build a cross in Cahuilla Hills where he rented a cabin. Along with the help of a neighbor, the 32-foot lighted structure was in place on 12-19-81. This original cross fell in 60 mile-per-hour winds on March 18, which set Mayor Ed Mullins and Desert Sun columnist Evelyn Young to raising funds for a replacement and means to pay the monthly electric bills. The second cross was slightly removed from the first site, constructed of all new materials, and lowered to the rocky elevation by a helicopter. In the spring of 1986 the cross went dark briefly when the price of electric for it skyrocketed from $100 to $300, causing the Community Cross Fund to be depleted. Over the years John McCormick, a local entertainer, kept the bulbs replaced; and Yvonne Beckham put the cross preservation in her will. In 1996 a new aluminum cross was installed in a less windy place by leaders of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church.

Peace Memorial at Civic Center Park was dedicated on August 19, 1992. Its sculptured stone slab flames represent "peace" against five 10-foot dark marble monoliths which represent each branch of the armed services and are inscribed with the names of Coachella Valley soldiers who died in W.W. II. Korean. Vietnam and Persian Gulf wars.

The ground-breaking for Palm Desert's Holocaust memorial took place in Civic Center Park took place on November 13, 1994. The committee, under the leadership of Joe Brandt, raised $375,000 for the six-figure sculpture and twelve bronze relief plaques depicting a history of the Nazi genocide of 11 million people. Dee Clements, the sculptor, did an exemplary work in creating the suffering victims. The art work was dedicated on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of landmarks and monuments. There are many more that could be mentioned. If we didn't mention your favorite, please feel free to let us know.



BIOGRAPHY OF E. GEORGE MARZICOLA

Edited by V. Folkers - Curator

George's life began on June 14, 1924 in Waukegan, Illinois. His father, Oreste, was a tailor who was born in Pietralta, Italy on the Adriatic Sea. Fond memories surface as George thinks of his father -- a mountain boy, honest, hardworking, and a very patriotic, naturalized American. Carlotta, George's mother, was born in Cerda, a province of Palermo, Italy on the island of Sicily. She spent her life in the traditional roles of housewife and homemaker. Mama strict and organized -- all the children worked -- from taking care of customers in the tailor-cleaning shop to house-work. She had a big heart, and George claims her as his best friend. There were three other children born before George in the family -- John, a career instructor in mathematics for several years at C.O.D., Sam and Cerina.

Back east George was awarded a 4-year scholarship to Fenwick High School, a private all boys school in Oak Park, Illinois. This experience impacted his hopes and ambitions for the rest of his life. However, the Marzicola family moved to California where George attended Los Angeles High School for his fourth year. The rest of his education was completed in the Los Angeles area, where he graduated from the University of Southern California then had one year in U.S.C. Law School.

During World War II, he had a special duty assignment in the U. S. Army Intelligence Service in the North African and Italian Campaigns for 3-1/2 years. Then, as a U.S. Army Reserve Company Commander, he served in both the California 13th Armored Division and the 63rd Infantry Division for 6-1/2 years at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro. California.

During his lifetime he moved from Waukegan to Chicago, Illinois. In California he resided in Van Nuys, Encino, West Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Palm Desert. His daughter Nancy Marzicola-Harper has lived in Palm Desert with her husband Bill for several years, where they are both employed and enjoy the desert lifestyle.

George's main career has been as principal owner of a real estate brokerage, syndication and development company in L.A. and Coachella Valley, where as general partner he formed 10 venture capital companies with 22 partner-investors. In the past his company has had affiliated divisions. After W.W. II he was a co-owner of a construction company, building houses and commercial properties in West Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley and Laguna Beach. Together with Robert Caffery, he subsequently formed a Beverly Hills Investment-Management and Mortgage Company. In addition he and his partners owned a Swiss-style restaurant near the U.C.L.A. campus in Westwood.

Finally, in 1963 he moved to Palm Desert and initially placed his real estate license in the office of Welcome-Kite Real Estate, next to Jim Beresford'd Carnival Café on Hwy. 111. In 1964 George was awarded a lifetime teaching credential by the California State Board of Education and conducted classes at the College of the Desert Night Session as a community service. In 1972-73 he was one of the original contributing and founding life members of the La Quinta Arts Foundation. Over the years George was a member of the Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage, and Indian Wells-La Quinta Rotary clubs. In 1974 George was elected and served as president of the Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells Board of Realtors (presently known as the California Desert Association of Realtors.) He served as a Director of the California Association of Realtors in 1975.

George donated 20 acres of land near the intersection of what is now Hovely Lane East and Carlotta Drive to the Evangelical Lutheran Society, a non-profit subsidiary of the Lutheran Church based in Iowa. The Society developed the Carlotta Good Samaritan Retirement & Health Care Center complex (presently known as the Fountains at the Carlotta.) They named the project "Carlotta" in honor of George's mother; the main building was named "Oreste" in honor of his father. As a community service project, George traveled to New Zealand as a representative of the City of Palm Desert and assisted in implementing the "Sister City" program with Gisborne.

George Marzicola has indeed played a major roll in the history of Palm Desert over the years. The Historical Society is honored to have him as a member and contributor to our archival collections.

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION MEETING

Chairperson Jean Ernst, has scheduled a meeting for all those who are currently giving their time as well as for others interested in our volunteer program. The meeting is on Tuesday, October 3 at 3:00 p.m. The Society museum is open to the public from September thru June, Monday to Saturday from 10:00 a.m. till 3:00 p.m. We need help in a variety of projects.....one or two is bound to tickle your fancy.

ANNUAL FALL LUNCHEON

Date: Wednesday, October 18 Place: Desert Willow Resort
Time: 11 a.m. social - 12 noon lunch Cost: $25 per person
Speaker: Ted Gaitas, President and C.E.O. of the McCallum Theatre for the Performing Arts
Reservations: call the Society at 346-6588

SUMMER ACTIVITY

While many of us headed for cooler climates during July and August, the Society's historic fire house was buzzing with Anne Tuttle's crew of volunteers. They accomplished the reorganization of the offices in the east wing, stored away items that had collected during the busy year, cleaned up the kitchen.....and generally got the place ready for the reopening on September 1st. We extend our sincere thanks to Don Graybill, Barbara and Warren Eastes (also Warren's handyman, Randy Hancock), Madonna Marman, Brett and Rose Romer.

MINI-MUSTER FIRE SAFETY PROGRAM

Chairpersons: John & Madonna Marman
Presented annually by the Society for local third graders in conjunction with Riverside County Firefighters and Desert Sands Unified School District

Schedule: Tuesday, Oct. 3.....Gerald Ford School
Thursday, Oct. 5.....James Carter School
Tuesday, Oct 10.....George Washington School
Thursday, Oct 12.....Ronald Reagan School
Tuesday, Oct 17.....Abraham Lincoln School

To volunteer, call the Society at 346-6588. This is a morning activity and traditionally includes lunch.

VETERANS' DAY

On Friday, November 10, the City of Palm Desert will host the "Commodores" - the official Navy jazz band from Washington, D.C. They will play from the amphitheatre at Civic Center Park at 7:00 p.m.. We have Pat Scully, the City's Special Event Coordinator, to thank for organizing this significant celebration. It appears that there are enough ushers to cover the event, but if you would like to help out -- please call Anne at 346-6588.

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DECEASED MEMBERS

We are sorry to report that the Society lost three valued members during the summer months. Our heart-felt sympathy is extended to their families and friends.

Ruth Griswold **Sophia Disney**

Edwin Clyde Hollenbeck -- "Holly" was an affectionate nickname used by his friends for a man who was a pioneer of the Coachella Valley. We at the Society knew him because of the dedication of his wife, Jean, who took a turn as president of our historical organization. Holly would accompany her to social events, entertaining those in the small groups nearest him. He was a handsome man with beautiful hair and twinkling eyes, and he was an avid gardener. A few years ago he loaned the Society his collection of antique tools for an exhibit.

With a Marine friend, Hal Hartwell, Holly opened H & H Lumber in Coachella in 1947. His partner didn't like the desert heat, so he moved away and Holly ran the business alone. Later Holly opened branch stores in Cathedral City and Mecca and worked until his retirement in 1997 after 50 years in the business.

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NEW CAHUILLA INDIAN EXHIBIT

This artistic display has been put together by Archie Sharpe and Hal Rover. You can see many items relating to the native Americans of our locality. There are pieces of pottery, hand-woven baskets, plants and best of all.....an archaeological dig !! Don't miss this interesting collection at the historical fire house.

FIRE HOUSE YARD SALE

On Saturday and Sunday, October 28 and 29, from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. we will again sponsor our biggest fund raiser. If you are in the cleaning out mode or you know someone who has saleable items for us, please call Anne at 346-6588 if a pick-up is needed. We do not want computers or related items, clothing, shoes, mattresses or pillows.

Starting the week of Oct. 23 between 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. we will price and arrange the things we have collected, so we need lots of help that whole week as well as on the sale week-end. This is another opportunity to volunteer and get to know other Society members in an informal social/work environment. Call Anne at 346-6588.

UPCOMING 2006-2007 EVENTS

Oct.	Mini-Muster (5 schools)	Feb. 17	Ferranti - Hiking, 9 am - 4 pm
Oct. 3	Volunteer Meeting - 3 p.m.	Feb. 23	Lecture - Reviving Art - 7 p.m.
Oct. 18	Fall Luncheon	Mar. 7	Rover - History - Library - 2 p.m.
Oct. 28-29	Annual Yard Sale	Mar. 23	Lecture - Ghost Mt. - 7 p.m.
Dec.	Student Tours	Mar. 25	Mullins Picnic, park - 11 a.m.
Jan. 14	Golf Cart Parade - "Take a Ride on the Wild Side"	Apr. 18	Spring Luncheon
		Apr. 27	Lecture - Bradshaw Tr. - 7 p.m.
Jan. 26	Lecture - Salton Sea - 7 P.m.	May 19	Founder's Day & Palm Awards, City Hall - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

MAYOR'S BREAKFAST

The City of Palm Desert is "Doing Great!"

President Dick Folkers represented the Society at the Sept. 10 meeting. Mayor Jim Ferguson provided the attendees with a plethora of information. The City's budget for the fiscal year 2006-2007 is $56 million, of which approximately 44% goes for public safety (police and fire services.) The Sheriff's Department, which acts as the City's police department, provides staffing of 1.5 police officers per 1,000 people -- Palm Desert's population is currently about 50,000.The City has financial reserves to continue operation for two years in case of a major catastrophe such as an earth- quake or flooding. Each year the City budgets to provide a surplus so the two-year reserve can be maintained.

Last year the City Council had concerns about the amount of money that the valley-wide Convention and Visitors Authority (C.V.A.) provided to help Palm Desert businesses. They gave notice of withdrawing, but subsequently the Council has agreed to continue funding the C.V.A. However, they have provided additional advertising and promotion funds of $200,000 which will be used exclusively for Palm Desert. We are fortunate to have a Council, Manager and staff that make Palm Desert "Number One" in the valley.

JULY 26 BOARD MINUTE HIGHLIGHTS

The ten board members present discussed and acted upon the following items:

1) Developed a form that describes volunteers interests and talents.
2) Agreed to provide ushers for the Veterans' Day Program at the park.
3) Will solicit publicity consultant information to help us promote our Society and activities.
4) Finalized the program and speaker for the Fall Luncheon.
5) Discussed the Firehouse Yard Sale.
6) Proceeding with Officers and Directors liability insurance coverage.
7) Proceeding with safety railing as required by the Disability Act.
8) Anne Tuttle will be working full time effective July 1, 2006.
9) Proceed to acquire two new computers and software to provide for e-mail and other computing requirements.
10) Support John and Madonna Marman as chairs of the October 2006 Mini-Muster series.
11) New lapel pins for the Society will be ordered and available by the September 1st fall re-opening.
12) The Society will be open from Sept. 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday thru Saturday. More volunteers will be recruited to cover these times.
13) The Society will be looking into the latest computer programs for the archives.
14) The City will be providing $35,000 for operations as approved by the City Council in June 2006.
15) The office will be cleaned and reorganized during the summer closure.
16) A bequeathal program will be developed for honoring members who pass away.

EUGENE CONROTTO -- PIONEER NEWSPAPER MAN

At the Society's Spring Luncheon last April a large collection of old Palm Desert Post newspapers and an original air-brush framed cartoon drawing were donated by Gene Conrotto. He had moved to Palm Desert in April of 1955 to take a job as associate editor of Desert Magazine. Eight years later he started the Palm Desert Post, which he published until he sold his interest in the paper in 1967.

President John F. Kennedy was in Palm Desert a few weeks before he was assassinated. The Post's coverage of that event was to run a full front page cartoon of Kennedy being greeted by Father Maurice Chase on the steps of Sacred Heart Catholic Church. The art work was done by Palm Desert resident Al Merryman, a former Hollywood artist. The unique local angle presentation of the assassination won wide acclaim. In a traveling exhibit of world wide press coverage of the event, the Post's front page was the only U.S. entry west of the Mississippi.

Note: Mr. Conrotto no longer lives in this area and we have not been successful in contacting him. If you know his home address, would you please call the office (346-6588) and give the information to Anne Tuttle.

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MEMBERSHIP NOTES

The Society has been expanding various programs and services. We need more members, especially those who will help at the various events. More people will also bring a new outlook -- fresh ideas. Please bring a friend, relative or work associate into our great group!

Dick and Ginny Folkers, Editors

Historical Society of Palm Desert
P. O. Box 77
Palm Desert, CA 92261

[redacted]
Hal and Angie Rover
45-657 Quailbrush
Palm Desert, CA 92260